

the large white lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium spectabile*) a plant to be avoided; and the absurdity of the notion in the opinion of the other members of the class did not in the least change her positive assertion of its poisonous qualities. It would be a curious and, withal, an interesting inquiry to trace up and catalogue such experiences and to investigate the nature of the poisoning, if such it be. The subject has considerable of the indefiniteness and evasiveness of the ghost, haunted-house and mesmeric questions now being investigated by the society for psychical research, and it may be doubted by some if the results of the inquiry would be any more valuable. There is, however, the substantial question of rhus poisoning, whose etiology has not yet been settled, to afford a *point de résistance*, and when that is fully elucidated the more obscure cases may, to some extent, fall easily into place. Even a knowledge of the extent of the subject would have a value.

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## OPEN LETTERS.

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### Organized botanical work.

It seems to me no more important suggestion looking to the promotion of the progress of botany in this country has been made than that of Prof. Farlow, in his paper entitled, "The Task of American Botanists," in which he urges that the amateur botanists of America be organized and their work directed. There are hundreds of educated young men and women in this country who are capable of doing something to promote botanical knowledge, some in one branch, some in another, and who are also eager to do it, but they need to be told what to do, what subjects to investigate. They are desirous of working, but do not know where to begin; or, perhaps, in many cases, they are industriously studying a subject which is too large for them, or one which has already been satisfactorily wrought out, so that their work profits none but themselves. In this way the science suffers an immense loss.

Now, it seems to me, a practical scheme might be devised whereby most of this wasted or misapplied talent might be turned into useful channels. Astronomers are organizing for the systematic study of the heavens; why should not the botanical talent of the country be similarly organized for the purpose of furthering botanical research in a systematic manner?

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### Crackling sound of *Utricularia*.

I write to ask an explanation of the distinct crackling sound produced by *Utricularia vulgaris* when it is disturbed. I had for some time supposed it was to be heard only from fronds removed from the water and beginning to dry, but I find the same phenomenon when the plants, old ones filled with sacks, still in the water, are disturbed. On shaking